Declassified and Approved For Release 2012/11/13 : CIA-RDP90-00965R000302500015-9

ARTICLE APPEARED ON PAGE 27

WALL STREET JOURNAL
1 March 1985

INTERNATIONAL

Nicaraguan Leader's Peace Offensive Unlikely to Win Converts in Washington

By Robert S. Greenberger
And Clifford Krauss
Staff Reporters of The Wall Street Journal

Daniel Ortega is running scared and talking peace. But that isn't apt to make much difference in Managua or Washington.

In recent days, Mr. Ortega, the president of Nicaragua and a leader of its ruling Sandinista organization, has taken the offensive in the verbal war with the Reagan administration, advancing several proposals aimed at establishing his image as a peacemaker—with, among other audiences, the U.S. Congress, where the Reagan administration is fighting an uphill battle to secure $14 million in funding for the Contra guerrillas seeking to overthrow the Sandinistas.

But key lawmakers on Capitol Hill are reacting cautiously to Mr. Ortega's latest peace initiative, which includes a promise to trim the number of Cuban advisers in Nicaragua and a moratorium on the import of new weapons systems. And Mr. Ortega's critics, in the Reagan administration and in Central America, insist he isn't changing his ways. "It's a cheap proposal to buy time," says Alfonso Callejas, a director of the Nicaraguan Democratic Force, the largest Contra group.

The White House yesterday reacted to the Nicaraguan proposals with a mixture of scorn and skepticism. White House spokesman Larry Speakes charged that "there's no substance" to the Nicaraguan offers. He added that "there's nothing in his (Ortega's) peace proposal, but he's making noises down there."

Nonetheless, late yesterday, according to news-service reports, Secretary of State George Shultz responded to Mr. Ortega's overtures by agreeing to meet with him today in Uruguay, where both men are to attend the inauguration of President Julio Maria Sanguinetti.

Even were Mr. Ortega to change his ways sharply, it seems unlikely he could satisfy the Reagan administration, which basically wants an end to the Sandinistas' reign and their Marxist policies. But his latest proposals suggest Mr. Ortega's need for a pulpit to counter the verbal barrage from Washington, where Mr. Reagan and his advisers are regularly scoring the Sandinistas as a totalitarian government in the Soviet camp and without legitimacy.

The overtures also hint at the success of the Reagan administration's big-stick approach to the region, exemplified by the invasion of Grenada and the overthrow of that island's Marxist government. If nothing else, such actions and all the talk—Mr. Reagan, for instance, recently said his goal is to "remove" the Sandinista government "in the sense of its present structure"—seem to have scared the Sandinistas.

In a speech yesterday in Austin, Texas, Vice President George Bush said the latest Ortega proposals "do not appear to represent significant moves." However, he added, "We would surely welcome genuine Nicarguan interest in peace." He reiterated that "all we are asking" is that Nicaragua stop exporting subversion, reduce its "bloated" military, sever military ties with the Soviet Union and Cuba and permit democratic pluralism at home.

To the Sandinistas, however, those aren't benign requests. Earlier this week, Victor Tinoco, Nicaragua's deputy foreign minister, journeyed to Washington to kick off the lobbying campaign against the administration's efforts to resume funding the Contras. In private meetings with members of Congress, he outlined measures that Mr. Ortega then disclosed publicly in Managua.

Congress suspended funding last spring, but has said it would appove the $14 million if the White House can justify the need for the aid. Under a congressional resolution passed last fall, the administration, beginning today, may ask Congress to resume the funding. So far, though, the outlook for resumption is dim. Rep. Michael Barnes (D., Md.), chairman of the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on Western Hemisphere affairs, labels the latest Sandinista proposals "a modestly positive initiative," but said: "I don't think it makes a lot of difference because I don't think the votes are there for the Contra program anyway."

Some of Mr. Ortega's proposals appear to be more show than substance. He is offering to remove 100 Cuban military advisers, for instance; but that is a tiny part of the up to 3,000 military advisers that U.S. intelligence reports estimate are there. Similarly, his offer of a moratorium on imports of new arms systems, including "interceptor aircraft," rings somewhat hollow, as the Soviets have steadfastly refused Sandinista requests to provide Nicaragua with high-performance jet fighters.

More substantive is Mr. Ortega's proposal to eliminate obstacles to the Contadora regional peace talks, which have been sidetracked by a diplomatic dispute between Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Members of Congress also are intrigued by his offer to let a bipartisan congressional delegation inspect Nicaraguan military bases.

Declassified and Approved For Release 2012/11/13 : CIA-RDP90-00965R000302500015-9